

Recreation and Parks Advisory Board Meeting
June 18, 2014 at 7:00 pm
Department of Recreation and Parks Headquarters
Conference Room #1
7120 Oakland Mills Road
Columbia, MD 21046

Members Present:

Dr. Joel Goodman, Chair; Janet Siddiqui; Dan Tracy; Winnie Tsao (pending).

Members Absent:

Thomas Franklin; JoAnne Kiebler; Sylvia Ramsey, Vice Chair.

Staff Present:

John Byrd, Executive Secretary; John Marshall, Chief, Bureau of Parks and Program Services Division; Raul Delorme, Chief, Capital Projects and Park Planning Division; Anna Hunter, Marketing and Public Information; Susana Burrell, Assistant to John Byrd; Tim Overstreet, Horticulture Supervisor; Joann Frush, Land Management Supervisor; Chris Tolson, Contract Management; Phil Bryan, Superintendent of Recreation Services; and Barbara Anderson, Recording Secretary.

Dr. Goodman called the June meeting of the Recreation and Parks Advisory Board to order at 7:00 pm.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes from the May 21st meeting could not be approved as there was not a quorum.

Correspondence:

Dr. Goodman introduced the soon-to-be-approved student member of the Advisory Board, Winnie Tsao.

Mr. Byrd introduced Susana Burrell as Doris Bedsaul's replacement. Ms. Burrell has been with the Department for 10 or 12 years or more. She was formerly the Assistant to the Parks Bureau Chief and Assistant to John Marshall.

Public Comments – Monica Lewis, Healthy Howard, regarding community garden plots in N. Laurel area:

Dr. Goodman stated that the Department received a request in the last few months that the North Laurel area was interested in a community garden and would like the Department's help. The Board would not be making any vote or official recommendation at this point.

Dr. Goodman welcomed Monica Lewis and her supporters to the meeting.

"Thank you for having me. My name is Monica Lewis, and I am the Acting Director of Community Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention at Healthy Howard. I'm actually here representing the senior council members of the 50+ Center at the North Laurel Community Center. And we are asking for land to be designated for a community garden in North Laurel.

'Let me tell you a little about Healthy Howard. It's a non-profit organization founded in 2007 that works to make access to quality healthcare and healthy lifestyle choices possible for everyone. Based in Howard County, we do this by connecting people to quality health coverage, promoting healthy environments in our schools, workplaces, restaurants, and childcare programs; building partnerships to improve communitywide health; empowering people to make healthy choices; and advancing policies that support health and wellness. And, we feel that a community garden has been shown to improve nutrition, physical activity, community engagement, safety, economic vitality, and neighborhood cohesion amongst community residents.

'One of the things I also wanted to point out is my program, which is called the HEAL Zone which stands for Healthy Eating Active Living, was established just last year to speak to information that was gathered on the health survey that was conducted back in 2012. It showed that North Laurel had a lot of health disparities. And so this program was established to speak to those health disparities. The goals of the HEAL Zone is to increase availability and affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables; increase physical activity both in institutions and in communities; decrease calories consumed via sugar sweetened beverages; and

increase access to affordable healthcare. A community garden is a great way to promote these health initiatives we felt and to build the neighborhoods.

'Keeping in mind that HEAL Zone was established, we've also been working in the community in North Laurel. We actually have a program called Cooking Matters. It's a store tour program that we offer to the residents that allowed them to be able to in a very interactive way learn how to buy fresh fruits and vegetables on a budget and how to read food labels. We've been doing this since May and have had really good success with it to the point where they are asking us to continue the program.

'The other thing that we've been tasked with doing was actually being very instrumental in getting a site at the North Laurel Community Center for the Roving Radish. This program makes it easy for Howard County families to create fresh, healthful, inexpensive meals. It's actually a mobile meal delivery program. And so we were very instrumental in making sure there was a sight in the North Laurel area."

Mr. Tracy asked how the Roving Radish worked.

Ms. Lewis continued, "What they will do is they will deliver meals that are all ready to be prepared once someone takes them home. And families can come and purchase them right at the drop off site at the North Laurel Community Center. They are \$24 for a kit. The kit will contain a protein, a grain, and produce. And it's already chopped and ready to go. It's actually two meals for a family of four. If you are on a subsidized program, you can actually qualify for the discounted rate of \$10. That's one of the newest programs in the area.

'We feel like North Laurel is a great opportunity to have a garden. The initiatives that we've started there, we would love to be able to continue those and have a garden to actually help with promoting these health initiatives that we think are so vital to the community.

'I also wanted to add, there was a woman who could not be here this evening. She's a community resident. She actually participates in the community garden on the PG county side of Laurel. And, she was wondering and hoping that there would be one established here because right now she has to not only travel to PG

County, but she actually has to pay a little bit more because she is not a county resident to use their garden. But for her, it's worth it. She felt that it's a very good educational tool for her children and for herself. I want to add that Michael Pollan who is an author who talks about food quite frequently, talks about how we have lost our way with food. And I think that a community garden is a way for us to reconnect with our food and to see how it's grown and hopefully teach our children about sustainability and how to care for our environment. So that's really all that I had to offer. I really hope that you are in support of this garden. If you need any additional information, I'm available to answer any questions."

Dr. Goodman asked Ms. Lewis if she had any idea where this garden would go.

Ms. Lewis stated she would need some information about how to find a suitable space.

Mr. Byrd added that the Department has hosted the Columbia Gardeners on County Parkland at three locations for thirty years. The Department is familiar with and supports the concept. The Department will see if there is any available land suitable in terms of infrastructure for parking, water, composting and everything else that would go along with a garden plot design. The Department would also like to see if a club could be formed to oversee the garden plot operation. He did not think that the Columbia Gardeners were interested in expanding that far in order to put it under their umbrella. The Department becomes just the landlord and has a model of organization that could be used with any new group to manage the gardens.

Mr. Byrd continued that the Department could do a little reconnaissance on potential land, either public or BGE owned.

Dr. Goodman asked if the community gardens in Long Reach were on BGE property and were they run by Columbia Gardeners.

Mr. Byrd responded in the affirmative.

Dr. Goodman stated that he would be hopeful that even though Columbia Gardeners was not interested in having a North Laurel garden under their

umbrella, they would still be willing to help a new gardening organization get started.

Mr. Byrd stated that once the property is found, there will be significant investment to provide access for parking and water, etc.

Mr. Byrd stated that the Columbia Gardeners partnership works really well. There is a waiting list for plots.

Mr. Byrd added that there is a precedent with BGE to use property under power lines to expand the gardening program.

Dr. Goodman asked Ms. Lewis who she anticipates using the community garden.

Ms. Lewis responded that she thought a diverse group of people would be using the garden – seniors, young families, and children in the community. Everyone can benefit from a community garden. She felt that when talking about health disparities, it is very important to try to make an impact on the youngest population. And the garden would be very beneficial to the senior population as well. Many of the seniors have told her that the garden helps them feel connected to the community.

Ms. Lewis added that the Howard County Community College students were very instrumental in helping to get petitions for the garden project. They collected over 300 signatures from residents who were interested in the garden.

Ms. Lewis stated that the 50+ Seniors wanted her to get this conversation started and are very interested in being the group to oversee the gardens.

Dr. Goodman commented that having a committee or board in place from the start would be very useful.

Dr. Siddiqui stated that she knew they were trying to revitalize the North Laurel Community Association, and she wanted to know if Ms. Lewis had been in contact with any of those individuals.

Ms. Lewis responded that she has been in touch with Bibi Perotte who is working to re-establish the community association. Ms. Lewis hopes to reconnect with her after she gets her board in place.

Dr. Goodman invited any supporters in the audience to comment.

Christine Hall, Executive Director of Healthy Howard:

"I am a huge supporter of having a community garden in the HEAL Zone and the Healthy Eating Active Living Zone for many of the reasons Monica has already stated. This is also an opportunity for Healthy Howard to ensure that the individuals that are being served through this program in North Laurel really have increased access to fruits and vegetables and produce that will help them live healthier and longer lives. They are also learning a lot about how to access this food and how to prepare it. It's just really been great to be a part of it, and we hope that we have your support."

Victoria Ahoure:

"I met Monica last week in Laurel at the community fair. I actually started talking to her about... she told me about the initiative... I told her I was interested in this from a personal side just because I just started not too long ago to grow things in my own garden. The reason why I started doing this is first because of the cost. I noticed it cost a lot of money for me to go and buy vegetables that I love to eat every day. Why not just grow them myself. And the second thing is that I've noticed that it's, like you said, it brings people together. We usually do it on weekends, have friends over, it's fun. Also I do real estate and I've noticed also a lot of people looking to buy right now have this thought that 'if I buy I want to have a yard so that I can grow my own fruits and vegetables. It's something that I think would definitely be beneficial to the community and for everyone to come together and learn about our food and really be conscious about what we eat. I think it's really important, so I would hope that you would support this as well."

Kelly McMillan:

"I'm a professor at Howard Community College. My students in my Public Health classes worked with Monica and Healthy Howard last semester. I

just wanted to say there's a lot of support in the community when my students went out and talked to people in the Laurel area, in the HEAL Zone area. They were very excited and very supportive of the community garden. We had 10 students, 9 or 10 students going out there and just talking to people about it, trying to see what the community is feeling. And, there is lots and lots of support for the garden in that area."

Chris Bueller:

"I was in her class. It was Community Health Advocacy class. And when Monica came in to present about this, I have never seen the class more excited when Monica finished presenting with getting involved in this. So we talked about the older population and the younger population, but those in the middle who are the most vital resource to impact change were very excited about this. And they did a lot of things out in the community to generate the support that Monica needed."

Ms. McMillan stated that this was not an official statement of the Community College, it's just her class.

Mr. Byrd stated that the next step would be to look at some maps and talk amongst themselves. Tim has looked at a few places over the years that might be viable. They will do that again and see what can be done.

Mr. Tracy asked Ms. McMillan if her student involvement would continue as the project grows.

Ms. McMillan responded that it could continue with a different group of students each semester.

Director's Report:

Horticulture and Land Management Division:

Mr. Marshall introduced the Horticulture and Land Management Division Team – JoAnn Frosh, Chris Tolson, and Tim Overstreet.

Mr. Overstreet presented an overview of the Horticulture and Land Management Division.

This division is based out of Recreation and Parks Headquarters on Oakland Mills Road.

In 1998 this division began taking care of the grounds at all County buildings.

In 2008 this division separated from the Natural Resource Division and became its own division.

Mr. Overstreet is an Operations Supervisor III. Chris Tolson is an Operations Supervisor I and does all of the Contract Management. Joann Frush is the Operations Supervisor. She maintains the crews that are working out in the field. There are 9 classified employees working under the supervisors in the Division. Many of the employees have been with the Parks Department for 25 years. Five employees have been with the Parks Department for 30 years. There are also 10 contingent staff members in the Division for a total of 22 dedicated staff.

At the time this presentation was compiled, the Division was responsible for 31 government building sites including 4 radio towers, 4 community road signs, Public Garden Sites, County administration buildings, libraries, senior centers, fire stations, Fire & Police Stations, Detention Center, Courthouse, Center of the Arts, Doyle House, Harriet Tubman Center, Thomas Dorsey Building, Latona House, and the Historic site and Welcome Center in Old Ellicott City.

This Division has also done a lot of renovation work at the formal gardens at Historic Belmont. They have just finished planting 2,000 annuals in the formal gardens last month.

Working with the County Administration, they do some work at county schools if the school is near a county park. Conversely, the school system will take care of a park if it's near a school. For instance, this division mows Rockburn Elementary School and Dayton Oaks Elementary School. And, the school board takes care of Lisbon Park.

This Division is also involved with tree work, snow removal, minor construction, landscaping, and equipment maintenance and works closely with various Natural Resources groups.

They are sometimes asked to assist the Capital Projects Bureau with landscaping or turf renovations on capital projects.

They also may be asked to help with landscaping or cleaning up a rental property purchased by the County.

This Division is an integral part of Wine in the Woods, FEMA, Timbers of Troy and the 4th of July Celebration.

Ms. Frush is part of the Division's Fleet Committee. She works with the selection of replacement vehicles and makes sure the specifications fit the needs of what the people are requesting. She also manages the fleet fuel card systems for the Department.

Last year the Division began working with READY in their efforts to build rain gardens throughout the County.

Much of their Division goes to the Highway Department to assist with plowing snow in the winter. And, they have their own snow removal responsibilities such as opening up the sidewalks in Ellicott City and clearing the parking lots and sidewalks in all of the park sites.

They also work with Tourism and Facilities.

Landscape Maintenance is another function of the Division. This would include landscaping, watering, pruning, tree removal, weeding, mulching, and integrated pest management. They do a minimal amount of pest control. Some areas have been converted from wood mulch to stones to save labor.

With regards to turf, they do not only mowing but also flail mowing, turf renovation and stabilization, edging and trimming. Six staff members do all of the regional parks plus 20 additional sites in about a 3 ½ day week.

All government buildings are now under contract management, because the Division does not have the manpower to maintain them all. There is one person who manages all the contracts for turf, landscape, pest, tree removal, minor construction and Miss Utilities.

In addition to Wine in the Woods, this Division is also involved in Blossoms of Hope – a program to plant cherry trees in hopes of promoting tourism in the County. The cherry trees are scattered throughout the park system and government buildings.

Ms. Frush presented some statistics about Operation Management:

- 332 acres of turf mowing
- 3,456 trees
- 4,828 shrubs
- 90,802 sq. ft. of mulched beds
- 225 work orders per year on average
- 31 Government Buildings
- 46 Park Mowing Sites
- 4 Other Mowing Sites
- 15 Miscellaneous Sites (adjacent to open space lots)
- Troy Hill Park and Blandair II will be added next year.

Mr. Byrd stated that contractual funding increases every year.

Mr. Marshall added that the Division has taken on more special projects and has consequently needed to rely more on contracts.

Mr. Overstreet introduced Chris Tolson, Contracts Management Supervisor.

Mr. Tolson stated that 31 Government Buildings, 4 Radio Towers, 4 Community Signs, 2 Community Centers, 38 Parks, and 4 Miscellaneous Sites are currently under contract. They are in the process of adding 4 additional sites including the Columbia Flier Building, Long Reach Shopping Center, and some areas along Route 40. They are also preparing to consolidate some of their contracts by converting to a zone system in the County.

Mr. Marshall added that there is a lot of work involved in keeping track of all the contracts, making sure the work is being done and monitoring schedules.

Ms. Frush added that most of the community parks are now contracted out. The regional parks are done in house.

Mr. Tolson commented that there are some items that are no longer done in house such as tree climbing and utility location.

Ms. Tsao asked if it would be cheaper to hire more employees for the Department than to contract out.

Mr. Overstreet responded that since the Division performs such a variety of tasks, some tasks could be cheaper to do with contract employees and some tasks would be much more expensive. A contractor may also not be able to react quickly to urgent needs, or if they can, it would be very costly. In house staff also usually produces better quality work.

Bureau of Parks and Program Services:

Mr. Marshall stated that the Celebration of Partners in Parks will be happening November 2nd from 2pm to 4pm. Save the Date cards will be going out very soon.

County Park Rangers participated in a Search & Rescue Training. One of the Rangers used his training to help rescue a child in the Savage River last week. Rangers are now carrying throw bags to assist in water rescues.

Chesapeake Shakespeare Company opened at the PFIHP this past weekend June 13/14/15.

The Parks Bureau is participating in the beta testing of the new SeeClickFix app. The app is available for download now and can be searched under "Tell HoCo." Citizens will be able to use their smart phones to report maintenance issues. The County Executive will be making an announcement when it goes live to the public. Mr. Marshall is hoping to adapt this to be the Department's own internal public work order system.

Robinson Nature Center won the 2014 Certificate of Excellence from Trip Advisor.

The Horticulture and Land Management Division has made the first steps for the READY group to maintain several bio-retention areas around the government buildings.

Jacque Galke will be retiring at the end of July after many years with the Department.

The Horticulture and Land Management Division has been working very hard at Belmont in the formal gardens area. Grand Opening for the public will likely be in October.

Outdoor only events are being held at Belmont until the Manor House is completed. The first wedding was held there this past weekend and was a great success. Another wedding is scheduled for this weekend.

The Howard County Conservancy is in the Carriage House now and has completed its first full month of operations. Summer Day Camps begin next week.

Dr. Goodman asked how the metal detection program went.

Mr. Marshall answered that the program did not happen. Only one person registered, so the program was cancelled.

Dr. Goodman asked about the emerald ash borers.

Mr. Marshall responded that the ash borers are out now. Additional funding has been allocated to start restoring some of the areas where the ash trees have died. It will take years, but eventually nearly all ash trees will be destroyed. Some experimentation regarding treatments is ongoing in the Owen Brown area.

Bureau of Capital Projects, Park Planning and Construction:

Mr. Delorme reported that the pool at Belmont has been renovated into an aquatic garden and will be filled with water next week. He may ask Tim Overstreet if he can sod the area as many wedding parties will want to take pictures there. The contractor is in the process of sanding the walls and floors of the Manor House. The windows may be installed in the next week or two. The cedar shakes for the roof have arrived, so work on the roof will be starting soon.

Dr. Goodman asked if a meeting with the Belmont neighbors regarding the road has taken place.

Mr. Marshall responded that he had a good meeting with the neighbors to discuss signage along the road, pull offs, and road improvements. It was decided that the road will not be repaved. Use agreements will need to be established with some of the neighbors to get their approval for pull off areas. The Department may have to get a waiver from MD Environmental Trust for an area or two. There has not been a final decision concerning the location of the main entrance sign. Otherwise the signage looks good. The neighbors are happy with what is going on at Belmont.

Mr. Delorme added that the Department has accepted an offer on the Dobbin House. Settlement is scheduled for mid July. It will be a private residence.

Mr. Marshall stated that the Caretaker should be in place by August 1st.

Mr. Delorme reported that proposals have been received for the Butterfly House and Storage Building. The proposals are under evaluation. He hopes construction will begin in late July.

Dr. Goodman asked about the playground.

Mr. Delorme responded that they are taking that project a bit slower now. They want to make sure they have proper ADA access.

Dr. Siddiqui asked when the Butterfly House would be complete.

Mr. Delorme answered that he did not have a specific date, but he didn't think it would take long to construct. There was a problem with the existing pathway and needed to be regraded.

Troy is on schedule to open up in August. The contractor is now backfilling the site with topsoil and seeding. The artificial turf fields are complete. Paving is complete.

Restroom construction at Alpha Ridge is going well. Documents for the Astronomy Building have been released and are in Purchasing.

The Department has received the proposal to begin design on Parking Lot F in Ellicott City.

Mr. Byrd stated that there is a covenant on property adjoining the Parking Lot. The Department will need to negotiate with the donors of the property to allow this type of use.

There was a rededication of the tennis courts at Centennial Park on Tuesday.

Dr. Goodman asked if there was a ground breaking at South Branch.

Mr. Delorme responded that there has not been a ground breaking. The water tower is down. He is supposed to receive a proposal from the contractor by Friday concerning the pavilion. The playground is in Maryland at the installer's warehouse. He is anticipating construction to start in the next week or so.

Mr. Byrd added that he did not anticipate having a formal ground breaking ceremony.

Dr. Goodman asked about the cricket pitch issues reported at the last meeting.

Mr. Byrd responded that he was able to work with the school system to add another pitch to the Murray Hill Middle School site. There are now two cricket pitches at Murray Hill.

Mr. Byrd also reported that he has spoken with the president of the Ridgely's Run Community Center regarding a patch of ground in that area that is large enough for a cricket pitch.

Mr. Byrd stated that the Department has committed to adding QuickStart Tennis lines to 8 to 10 sites. The County may be able to receive some funding from USTA to add the lines.

Bureau of Recreation and Administrative Service:

Mr. Bryan delivered the report in Ms. Wetherald's absence.

July is Recreation and Parks Month. Two to three events each week are planned throughout the month. Most of them are free.

Some summer camps started this week in the Community Centers. There are over 900 camps this year with over 15,000 kids registered in those camps. Revenue to date is \$2.3 mil.

Dr. Goodman asked how that compared to last year.

Mr. Bryan responded that revenue is up over last year.

Upcoming events include the July 4th Fireworks at the Columbia Lakefront. Zambelli fireworks will be the vendor this year. August 16th is the Rockburn Car Show. October 3rd is the Celebration of Sports Golf Tournament at Timbers, and the Hall of Fame inductions will take place October 21st. Al Bumbry will be the keynote speaker at that event.

Ann Combs will be retiring at the end of June.

Old Business:

None

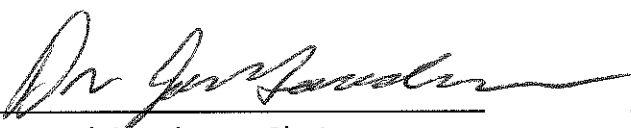
New Business:

Mr. Byrd stated that he thought Winnie Tsao would be officially appointed to the Advisory Board at the next Council voting session. Her first meeting as a Board member will be in September. A Planning and Zoning liaison, Bill Santos, has been recommended for appointment to the Advisory Board.

There is no meeting in July, and the annual Crab Feast will be in August at Timbers.

There being no further discussion, Dr. Siddiqui made a Motion to adjourn. Mr. Tracy seconded the Motion.

Dr. Goodman adjourned the meeting at 8:30 pm.



Dr. Joel Goodman, Chairman



John Byrd, Executive Secretary